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FRENCH LITERATURE.

Etudes sur la Littérature Française, par RENÉ DOUMIC. Troisième série. Paris: Perrin et Cie., 1899. 8vo, 311 pp.

PROBABLY no more interesting subject has presented itself in the history of nineteenth century literature than the struggle between the impressionist and dogmatic schools of criticism in France, represented by Jules Lemaître, Anatole France, etc., and Ferdinand Brunetière, the founder of pure literary criticism in its broadest sense. The principal questions under discussion were the following: Can a critic be impersonal? Is it the duty of the critic to criticise defects or beauties?

An impressionist critic certainly supposes the same nature and same æsthetic aptitudes of his reader, for he reflects the work read and lives in its emotional life. If he condemns a work, all those who have enjoyed it have enjoyed a false pleasure. The dogmatic or objective critic insists on the right of individual taste, but this must be based on certain laws, among which education is of prime importance. These laws of objective criticism have been most admirably stated by M. Ricardou in his *Critique Littéraire*, 1896. The first obligation is to produce an æsthetic emotion with a truly humane value, revealing an enlarged taste, humanized by tradition and expressing what essential, what truth and what morality humanity possesses. Truth in literature does not mean to copy appearances nor to reveal the laws of being; but, while conforming itself to these appearances and rules, to disengage and express the essentially humane in man and the depth there is in him. As life is so much more truly humane the more it is moral, to be true in literature is, therefore, not to moralize, not to instruct, but to disengage and express what in man distinguishes him from nature and makes him man, what ennobles and inspires the reader by communicating itself to him and gives him the æsthetic emotion required; it means to describe immorality also, but not in a way to harm, shock, or dishearten, but in a way that our moral qualities and virtues will be so much more striking by the contrast with our miseries. And the expressive force must choose, coördinate, and put in relief what in

reality is humane, true and moral. Thus is the art of expression put at the service of truth and morality. Based on this method, impersonal, dogmatic criticism is possible. This criticism has had a natural and logical growth. Sainte-Beuve and Taine developed historical criticism; M. Brunetière, by applying the theory of evolution and that of humanity, has brought French literary criticism to its culmination. The reviewer sincerely believes that there is no more important writer and no more profitable study in nineteenth century French literature than M. Brunetière. In criticism itself his influence is especially felt. The finest critics of this generation are his admirers and willingly call themselves his disciples. Foremost among these are René Doumic, Faguet, Texte and Ricardou. The works of these men are by far the best of this decade in literary criticism. Such an array of brilliant disciples is certainly a great credit to such a young man as M. Brunetière. These men are all critics, too, and desire to be nothing but critics, which probably accounts for the depth and soundness of their works.

When M. Doumic has a question to discuss he usually waits for the appearance of a book bearing on it; he rarely reviews the book, simply stating in a few words its value. He never writes unless he has a reason for doing so, so different from the Impressionists.

The present book under review is the third of a series of essays on literary questions and questions of the day. He has already written three volumes on modern writers, mostly novelists; two on the modern drama: *De Scribe à Ibsen*, *Essais sur le théâtre contemporain*, and one entitled, *La Vie et les Mœurs au jour le jour*. All of these essays are sound, forceful, logical, full of difficult but important questions, showing a broad, accurate, and vigorous scholarship. The following is a short analysis of some of the essays of his last work.

The first subject he treats is, *La Manie de la Modernité*, apropos of Houdar de Lamotte and *La Querelle des anciens et des modernes*. The fad among writers of to-day is to be modern, to be so purposely, to be in touch with the present fads, etc. This craze is of recent date, Lamotte being one of the first to be affected, and

today the interest is somewhat revived by the study of P. Dupont, *Un poète philosophe au commencement du XVIII^e siècle*. M. Doumic points out the characteristics of Lamotte, his versatility, his fads, defects, etc. Lamotte knew his defects and, therefore, wrote according to his talents, and indeed he wrote well on things he understood very badly. He was always ready to confess his faults, at the same time those of others, comparing himself to Homer and other great writers. After showing the shallowness and platitude of Lamotte's reasoning and judgment, he points him out as a true precursor of the modern dilettants and impressionists, as opposed to the sound and severe school of objective criticism. How much the following sounds like Brunetière:

Mais si le jugement de goût est pure affaire de sentiment, et si tout se ramène à une impression de plaisir immédiat, combien cela est commode, et que voilà une théorie qui vient au secours de l'ignorance mondaine! Les gens de qualité, qui savent tout sans avoir rien appris, seront reconnaissants à l'écrivain qui s'en remet si généreusement à la sûreté de leur instinct. Toutes les femmes seront pour lui.

The remainder of the study is devoted to the question so much discussed to-day in France—The ancient languages in our modern educational systems. The second essay deals with *Voyages de Montesquieu*. Inasmuch as M.'s works were prepared by the means of his confidences, and inasmuch as we have these works, there is very little information gained from such publications. Nothing new is drawn from these notes and letters concerning the man, his life, or his ideas. He then speaks of M's travels, the traveler himself, an acute, close observer, a fine careful student; the effects of these travels upon him, his study of art. He concludes that M. was neither a tourist nor an artist; he was a historian and moralist, a collector of facts. After these voyages M. retires to his study and there, after long reflection and meditation, he writes his work. Doumic shows what impression these travels made upon M., and then how these impressions, in note form, were changed by reflection and quiet meditation, and how they built up his great works.

The third study is on *La Préface de Cromwell à l'usage des classes*. In this he shows the progress the University is making in its

choice of subjects for instruction, turning its attention now to the modern writers. The objection to the *Préface* is that by bringing Victor Hugo, the æsthete, historian, and thinker before children of fifteen, they lose sight of the poet and bring out the character that they (Doumic, etc.) refuse to salute as an educator. The *Préface* is full of confused ideas, false theories, and written in a tone of haughty assurance. It is a work of circumstance, written for the immediate needs of polemic. A book in which one idea contradicts another only encourages in youth a very philosophical dilettantism. M. Doumic objects especially to the two main assertions in the *Préface*.—Everything in nature is in art; absolute liberty of the artist.—There are no rules, no models. The book is well annotated and of use to scholars. He concludes in denouncing the books in general imposed upon the *lycéens* and the *Préface* caps the climax of them all. This is undoubtedly one of the finest of these essays. In it the doctrines of dogmatic criticism are most excellently applied.

French correspondence has certainly no equal or rival in any other literature; it really forms a part of French literary history. The great epoch for this was that of Mme de Sévigné and Voltaire. The letters of the nineteenth century writers are really not letters; Mérimée's correspondence, however, forms a striking exception. "Why do our contemporaries no longer write letters?" Newspapers, telegraphy, the organization of society, the place the man of letters occupies and the manner in which he exercises his profession are the reasons. Mérimée wrote many letters and these have left us a portrait quite different from the one already existing. They show in him a complexity of character truly wonderful, but they also show a weakness, especially in his love affair. To hide this weakness of which he was only too conscious he veils himself in the garb of *mystificateur*. M. had leisure to write, took pleasure in doing so; he traveled extensively, lived in all kinds of society, saw nearly all varieties of social life. These very reasons close the doors of the art of letter-writing to our nineteenth century writers, who have not the time and only write when they have to.

In *Une Apothéose du Naturalisme* M. Doumic gives vent to his feelings on Zola and the later naturalists of 1875. The occasion for this is *Le Bilan littéraire du XIX^e siècle* by G. Meunier, which is no more than a great eulogy on Zola. After ridiculing the work and Zola, he takes up a very serious and profound discussion of what naturalism really is, the difference between the naturalists of 1850 and those of 1875.

In the next essay he pays a well-deserved tribute to Alphonse Daudet. The principal points in which he differs from his school lie in his sympathy, good healthy characters, lack of brutality, of tiresome minutiae; a friend of the Goncourts and Zola, but not of their methods. More artist than thinker; *gaieté* and congeniality, a fine story teller, full of harmless irony and humor. Daudet never goes to extremes; he is always charming in his pictures of *la vie mondaine* and *la vie intime*, whose characters belong to the highest and lowest classes of society. His work is like an elegant piece of architecture, finely joined, brightened and made cheerful by arabesques which, looked upon as a whole, appears frail. He lacks a certain power of creative force due to his strong sensibility which he fails to control and from which he cannot free himself. An analysis of the principal characters and of his sensibility make this study exceedingly interesting. Doumic concludes by stating that Daudet was the most amiable writer of his generation and the one who, at the same time, has given of the society in which he lived the largest, the most varied, and the most faithful image. His *contes* are already classic. Without a very penetrating knowledge of souls, a wide experience of the world, or a very personal interpretation of things; without any kind of conception of life he has given us what is best and wholesome with a finely colored imagination and the true nature of an artist.

In his study of Loti he shows that he has never attained again to the height of his *Pêcheur d'Islande* and *Frère d'Ives*. An analysis of the nature and organization of Loti follows; his utter lack of ideas, of abstract thought and analysis of sentiment; but a marvelous painter and dreamer. He has the art of perfectly describing and noting traits, colors and shades, as well as rendering what is with-

out precise form, definite color, immaterial and unreal. With *Ramuntcho*, however, another Loti is before us. The affected melancholy and weak languor found in his first works, sickly and unwholesome, is now one of reflection, grave, virile, and nearly religious. Now we face the great human *tristesse* inherent in our nature, coming from the consciousness of our *fragilité d'éphémères en face de la Nature éternelle et impassible*.

In René Bazin, one of the younger novelists, we find a very welcome exception to the ordinary brutal and tiresome naturalists; his writings are wholesome, ennobling and pure. *Noëllet*, *Sarcelle bleue* and *Donatienne* are among his best works.

In his essay on *Les idées du Comte Tolstoï sur l'art*, he first analyzes the work, points out the defects, discusses beauty in art and what art really is. It is beyond the limits of this review to enter into a discussion of them.

In the essay *Les Mésfaits de la Vigne* by Demolins, the evident weakness of modern France, its organization, physical, social and political are discussed. Demolins endeavors to trace this, by the influence of race, and especially place, upon writers and statesmen, to the vineyard; in this book he applies this theory to the South of France; Touraine and her vineyard have fostered the *esprit gaulois*, and with it what may be called the nude; that is, grossness and immorality as seen in Rabelais, Balzac and Courier. But the theory of place alone does not hold. Man is dependent on his social and physical *milieu*, but is not a prisoner in it and even has the power to change the *milieu* himself, which is so often overlooked and especially so by M. Demolins.

Un Roman de Mœurs Napolitaines is quite a detailed analysis of Mme de Serao's novel *Au Pays de Cocagne*, describing the passion of gambling in Italy and its results.

M. Barrès in *Les Déracinés* comes before the public again after a long silence in a new form; he takes up a social stand now. *Trop de chimères et trop de sophismes ont faussé la conscience publique: il n'est que temps de la redresser*. This he attempts in a trilogy of which this novel is the first under the form of a political story. M. Barrès is well fitted for this difficult task; but when he takes upon

himself to discuss the educational system of France and condemns it he loses his force. His discussions are tiresome, nothing but a heap of documents, gathered by reading and observation, of all sorts of political questions and events. But in spite of these defects there is great talent in the book and M. Doumic proceeds to give him and other promising novelists good advice.

A propos du "Désastre" is a study on the war of 1870; it is a strong book. Two important points are pointed out; 1. The book does not leave a depressing impression, but a powerfully strong patriotic feeling; 2. the duty of the soldier and his rôle in society to-day. The book came at the right time, for the French people have repaired their faults and can now acknowledge them without blushing. It is now time to draw the lesson. Above the faults of individuals and the errors of a régime, above the souvenirs of defeat, tableaux of humiliation and desolation, the authors have drawn up a great image of the army, impersonal, silent, impassible, disciplined, faithful to its traditions, resolute in its attachment to an undisputed duty. The book is useful because it is an act of faith in the army. As long as Europe has not proclaimed a universal disarmament, he who fastens the bonds between the army and nation has produced a work of a good Frenchman. MM. Paul and Victor Margueritte have done this.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

SOME OLD FRENCH PLACE-NAMES IN THE STATE OF ARKANSAS.

TO THE EDITORS OF MOD. LANG. NOTES,

SIRS:—I have read with interest, in your February number, Mr. John C. Branner's paper on the origin of some old French place-names in the state of Arkansas.

Although some of the origins here given of the queer names now prevalent are quite doubtful, the article surely makes a good step

towards the etymology of the early place-nomenclature of Arkansas.

I may, later on, examine closely the origins set forth in the paper referred to; but I will now present the few remarks that a rapid perusal of the paper has suggested to me.

DARDANELLE.—The origin given as being derived directly from the French *dort d'un œil* (not *œille*) is not probable, as *dort d'un œil* means 'a disturbed or uneasy sleep.' It might possibly have originated from *darde un œil*, 'cast an eye,' that is, 'be on the look-out,' 'a rocky point projecting into the river at this place and making the navigation a little dangerous.'

ELEVEN POINTS.—Mr. Rose's explanation *Levé pont*, has no value whatever. *Levé pont* means nothing in French. If it were *Pont levé*, it would have a little more probability; the words have likely been interverted. The origin of this place-name is rather American than French.

GULPHO.—*Calfat*, calker, is not a proper name, and the name *Gulpha* does not likely derive its origin from the word *calfat*, as the calkers, in those early days, could not have been very numerous in the Arkansas territory.

LA FAVE.—This name may possibly have been originated from a Lefebvre or Lefaiivre family, not likely from *la fève*.

LOW FREIGHT.—The origin given may be right, as the old French traders used to pronounce *l'eau froide*, "*l'eau fret*." This pronunciation of *froide* is current to-day among the French-Canadian peasantry.

I would recommend to Mr. Branner two papers on place-nomenclature, one by Mr. George Johnson, of the Canadian Federal Statistic Bureau, and the other by Mr. W. F. Ganong. Both of them are to be found in the recent volumes of the *Transactions* of the Royal Society of Canada.

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Quebec.